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## An Old Room with a New History

### Classmate Magazine

Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School

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# Focus of the Month

# History and Holidays

## AN OLD ROOM WITH A NEW HISTORY by VICKY BROWN

In our society, where changing needs confront historic structures, progress and preservation are often pitted against each other. Sadly, in many cases, the old is lost to make way for the new. On the grounds of the once renowned and luxurious Hotel Del Monte, the Navy, a service known for honoring tradition, has met the challenge of blending the old and the new. The Protestant Chapel, located in Herrmann Hall is a masterful example of adaptation and preservation, of an older history blending into a newer one.

Imagine for a moment that you are standing in the old Hotel Del Monte. It is early afternoon and time for tea. You have just returned from your room after changing from your morning's attire to something more suitable for the afternoon's activities. Your maid has retired to her room on the fifth floor where she will wait until it is time to change for supper. Your husband, who went downstairs shortly before you, is waiting tea for you in the smoking lounge. As you exit the elevator, the entire Lobby opens to your view. Directly in front of you, the Main Lobby, with its two-story windows, looks out upon the Roman Plunge and the graceful lawn where couples and families are taking an afternoon stroll. To your left, between the free-standing columns, you spot your husband waiting near a window overlooking the fountain in the sunken garden.

Your heels click over the smooth brick floors and sink into the thick oriental carpets as you pass between the columns that are surrounded by huge potted palms and ferns to reach your husband's side. On the southern end of the room before the fireplace high tea is being served. Over the fireplace is an immense painting of Spanish conquistadores claiming a new land — you recognize the style but can't quite place the artist. Your husband informs you that the American illustrator Dan Groesbeck had created this rendition of General Gaspar de Portola's landing in the Monterey Bay in May of 1770, as well as the painting at the north end of the room. From your table you can see that Groesbeck has rendered the subject



of Father Junipero Serra building the Mission San Carlos Borromeo in June of 1770.

During your tea you examine the painting of de Portola's landing. You admire the vivid use of colors, the panoramic view of the bay, the stern visages of the soldiers, the friars bringing the cross to this new world, and the heroic figure of de Portola, sword drawn and banners unfurled behind him, claiming the land of Upper California. In the background the ship seems to merge into the vision of a shining city on the shore. Since you seem so interested in the painting, your husband offers to walk you to the other end of the room to see the second painting.

Your tea finished, you walk across the carpeted lounge, past deeply upholstered chairs set in intimate groupings, to the balcony overlooking the painting and the stairs to the lower concourse. In this painting, Groesbeck portrays Father Serra and the native Indians working to build the mission under the watchful eyes of the soldiers. Your husband points out the Indian woman with the basket of fruit. He tells you how Serra introduced cattle, sheep, grains, and fruits of New Spain (Mexico) to the Esselen, Costanoan, and Salinan Indian tribes. In the background can be seen the rising walls of the mission. You decide to drive over

to the Carmel Bay tomorrow to look at the ruins of the Mission that was once Serra's headquarters in the place he called the "Garden of God." As you leave the lounge to arrange for a buggy and picnic lunch for tomorrow's excursion, you wonder what the future holds in store for this graceful establishment.

Today you can still see Groesbeck's works, but only if you first enter the room that is now the Protestant Chapel. However, over the past forty years this has not always been so. In the late 1930's the Navy leased the Hotel Del Monte, complete with staff, to house the students of its newly established pre-flight training school. The smoking lounge was left untouched but most of the original furnishings were replaced with more utilitarian ones.

On February 15, 1944, under war time conditions the Navy continued to lease the hotel and its kitchen and dining room staffs. The site was re-commissioned as a basic training center. Head-high, free-standing partitions were placed between the columns to form a semi-private reception area for the enlisted men's guests. Chaplain Cook, the present and fourteenth Protestant Chaplain, has in his files an old picture of the lounge at this time. The room, stripped bare of the beautiful rugs, fine furniture, and plants contained only wooden benches, trestle tables, and straight backed chairs. The only attempt to decorate the room was the placement of semaphore flags arranged in alphabetical order on either side of the fireplace. A pair of stately andirons stood in the fireplace. Chaplain Cook believes that these andirons, or an identical set, now stand in the Admiral's Reception Area (Main Lobby) fireplace. Despite the sparse furnishings, the servicemen and their guests captured in the old photograph seemed well pleased with their surroundings.

In 1951 the Navy purchased the hotel and most of its surrounding properties for about three million dollars. The Naval Postgraduate School was established on the property and Rear Admiral Ernest E. Herrmann was appointed the superintendent. While the Navy did purchase most of the old hotel property, some of the original buildings were declined; the present Saint John's Chapel was one of the latter. Admiral Herrmann was known as a deeply committed Christian and one

of many who believed that the new school would never be complete without a Chapel program.

A search was made to find an appropriate space for a temporary chapel. The old smoking lounge was found to be the ideal place. Admiral Herrmann had two "curtain walls" erected, the one which still divides the once-open lobby into the chapel and a corridor to the ballroom, and the other at the north end of the room, which placed the painting of Serra building the mission into an enclosed stairwell. If today you stand inside the chapel and look closely at the edge of the ceiling where it joins the wall, you can see spaces where the ceiling beams meet the wall imperfectly. Under the picture of de Portola's landing, and the cross entering the New World, an altar was built. The new altar completely sealed off the fireplace. On February 17, 1952, less than two months after the establishment of the school, Admiral Herrmann dedicated the Chapel with these words:

"Now it is because we are aware of the importance and reality of things unseen, of faith in God, hope for tomorrow, and love of all men, that we set aside a portion of this building for religious worship. In that spirit we dedicate this Chapel to the service of God and the spiritual good of all who shall worship here."

The "temporary" Chapel was used for both Protestant and Catholic services until 1963. Mass was celebrated at 8:00 a.m. and 12:15 p.m., with two Protestant services in between. This arrangement worked most of the time, but occasionally the eleven o'clock service ran overtime because of a special program or visiting speaker. This led to some dissatisfaction

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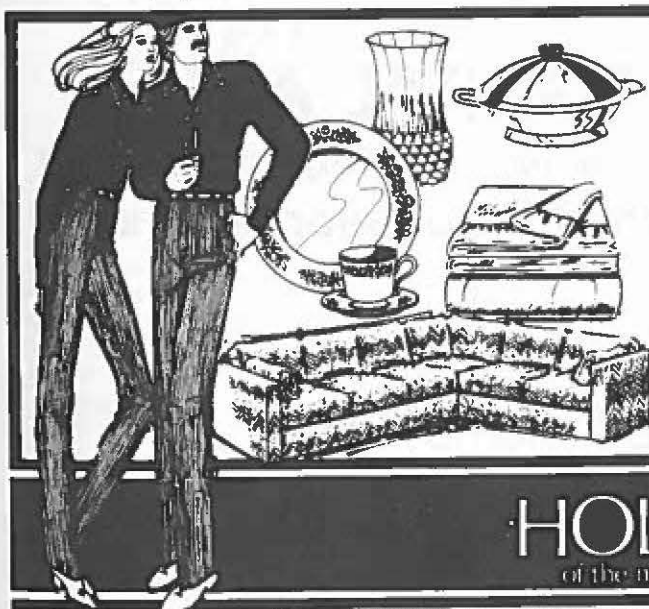
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and unhappiness for members of both faiths. For several years an appropriation for a new chapel building existed in the Navy budget, but never came high enough on the list to receive funding.

In 1963 the parishioners gained approval and the assistance of the command to convert a former theatre building into an appropriate place of worship for Catholic services. The major portion of the work to build the Catholic Chapel was done by volunteer parishioners. On November 23, 1963 the new Catholic Chapel celebrated its first Mass, a Requiem for late President John F. Kennedy. Later, by parishioner vote, the Catholic Chapel was named in honor of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

The old Chapel remained the home for the Protestant services. In 1980 the Chapel was renovated. After twenty-eight years the fireplace was uncovered and the temporary north wall was removed to incorporate the mission painting into the room. A choir loft was built over a new false ceiling atop the stairwell. The altar at the south end of the room was replaced and moved to the north end of the room in front of the choir loft. The balcony railings were left intact inside the newly-enclosed stairwell. They can be seen today as you descend the stair between the Chapel and the Ballroom leading to the concourse. Under Chaplain Cook, the Protestant Chapel celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of its dedication on February 21, 1982. This temporary place of worship is now a permanent part of the Naval Postgraduate School. It seems fitting that the Chapel Admiral Herrmann dedicated is in the heart of the building named in his honor, a building where the beauty of the past and the needs of the present are joined in harmony. □

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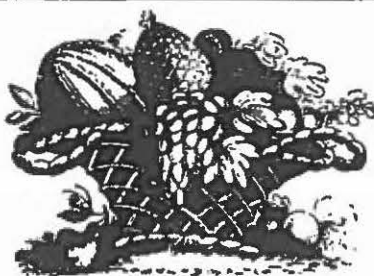
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